INTERPRETIVE TRAINING

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We have heard much this morning about research and natural research management. We'll be hearing more in the next couple of days, I'm sure.

All of the "upper level" discussion is fine, but how do we reach the man on the city street and make him realize the importance of ecosystems, and research, and resource management? In our system of government, I believe it must be through interpretation, interpretation of the story. In interpretation the key words to me are: simplicity and motivation. It is only through awareness on the part of the public that we will be able to secure the commitment that will lead to action -- hopefully to preserve and manage wisely.

Of my nineteen and a half years with the National Park Service, about twelve of them were spent in on-site interpretation, three and a half as an instructor for management and interpretation courses at our Stephen T. Mather Training Center in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, and the last four years as a park manager involved in interpretive training for National Park Service employees in the State of Hawaii.

In my years with the Park Service, too, I've been doing the two types of interpreting -- (1) interpreting, i.e. translating, for the American and Japanese delegates at the UJNR meetings, and (2) interpreting the park story and/or natural resource story.

The Japanese have a word for translation, and they have a word for interpreting, just as they have a term for "hot", as in hot coffee, and "hot" as in chili pepper.

Their word for interpretation is Kaisetsu, which translates as explanation. But interpretation is not that simple. Today, the word to those of us who are involved in interpretation means much more than that. There is a book written by Freeman Tilden called Interpreting Our Heritage which is the best book in my opinion on the subject, for those of you who wish to dig into the subject of interpretation further.

To me, interpretation means taking the facts that the scientists have given us, and restating them in such a way that our park visitors will understand and be "turned on" toward protecting those resources, and become committed toward their wise management. Plutarch summed this up

2,000 years ago when he said, "The mind is a flame to be kindled; not a vessel to be filled."

What then, is the job of interpretive training? It is to fashion a Stradivarius out of a few pieces of wood. However, let me hasten to add that the pieces must be of the right kind of wood.

Let us assume then, that our selection process has provided us with a trainable interpreter. It does not matter whether he or she is easy to train or difficult to train, so long as the interpreter proves to be trainable in the end.

Now that we have our guidelines in order, what then is the job that interpretive training has to do. First of all, an interpretive trainer must realize that the interpreter is the bridge between the scientist and the public. His job is to transmit accurately the data supplied by the scientist in laymen's terms.

But how does the interpreter "turn people on?" It means teaching the interpreter to reach people's feelings; making a site or resource relevant to people. It means, -- don't just talk about it; whenever possible, take the people to the resource. In interpretation, the use of two or more of the five senses of seeing, hearing, touching, smelling and tasting by the visitor is very important. The more the better. Too many times he is confined only to hearing and maybe seeing.

And to discuss the thing I call the sixth sense, interpreters must be taught to reach the people's feelings. Feeling is the one common denominator among all peoples of the world. It crosses language barriers. Who does not feel love, hate, warmth, jealousy, sorrow?

People like to feel good and it disturbs them when someone or something threatens this "good feeling." Let me illustrate by reading something that was written by one of the trainees who at one time presented a straight interpretive talk without feelings. What I am going to read was his first attempt at reaching that sixth sense in the audience.

> Once, when we were very young, the world stretched out so high and wide that we couldn't even see the other side. We were small and it was big. Our minds reached out through the world so wide. There was grass. There were tastes and things to touch. Wonder was ours.
>
> We wondered and learned. This sound bodes well and that one's Aunt Nell. There's a texture to mud and it squashes and swells. The snow is cold and grandmother is old.

Our world then was us. Just what we could touch and taste, see, hear, or smell. The world was high and wide and we were very small.

Then we grew larger and the world expanded. Across the street and around the block. Down to the creek and over by the rock.

We touched and ran and smelled and laughed. We wondered and learned of rabbits and mice and laughter and friends. The world was high and wide and full of wonderful things.

We flexed our minds and flexed our muscles and grew wise and strong. We learned the how and we learned the why but the wonder slipped away. Responsibilities came and weighed us down and shoved the tadpoles out. Dignity grew, and who can squish in mud when there's dignity to do?

One day we looked and we were big. Business and rush. Money and rush. Bosses and wives and husbands and rush. Hurry and pass and never look back.

Too late to laugh. Too late to dance. Too late to jump and too late to wonder. There's no time now for a tadpole's twiggle or a little girl's giggle.

So dance little child. Dance and sing. Laugh and steal my heart away. I can't go back. But your world's still wide and full of grass and trees and ABC's. So dance little child, laugh and sing, down the hall and across the creek to that wonderful secret place of frogs and water bugs and rabbit tracks and wonder. --

I wish I had time to go.

by Lee Dalton-March 1972

Don't you think this person would act if he realized his sense of place was being threatened?

Interpreters must also be taught to think in terms of wholeness or look at the whole story. They must see the total picture. Any interpreter worth his salt, I believe, must have the environmental message in mind. Otherwise he'd be tellin only a facet of the complete story. For example, the life cycle of the goats makes an interesting story but what about the envorinmental depredations? Many times interpreters merely entertain by telling partial stories with no real objectives in mind.

A consistently good interpreter is a highly disciplined person. He understands objectives and outlining because he knows and believes what Seneca said nearly 2,000 years ago, "If a man does not know what harbor he is sailing for, no wind is the right wind." And I might add a Shimoda corollary, "No amount of wind is the right wind."

A good outlining prevents an interpreter's talk or program from meandering all over the countryside and aids in insuring a strong or memorable conclusion. I attended an interpretive talk once where the ranger spoke for 45 minutes and concluded his talk three times before he finally decided to quit for the night. My personal opinion is that a good interpreter can say anything worth saying in 20 minutes.

Interpretive training must make an interpreter aware that without the visitor there is no need for an interpreter, just as without the student there is no need for a teacher. To carry this further, there is no need for an interpreter to fill his talk with factual garbage if there is no need for them in getting his message across to the audience. Too many times interpreters spout off facts just to show how smart they are to the confusion of the visitor or listener, and thereby fail to get their message across.

Ideally, an interpreter must have a genuine liking for people. He will be at a definite advantage if he does.

Interpretive training also aims to instill versatility in an interpreter as a communicator. There are a variety of methods or tools that are available to him. One is his voice, another are his hands and eyes, and still another is his appearance.

The human voice is one of God's most wonderful gifts. If used properly it can make people happy or it can make people sad. We all know that if you combine the voice with the proper words, you can make people happy, you can get them excited, and you can instill fear in them. And yet, when we get in front of an audience, many times we become

formal, stiff and forget the voice's versatility. Speaking of the voice, volume is important, too. Remember to talk to the people in the back row.

Next the hands. If one is reading a text as I am, the hands are pretty much tied down. However, hand gestures can be used even in reading situations and an interpreter must keep this in mind.

In reading a text an interpreter has sacrificed much eye contact. He should make sure wherever possible that eye contact is direct, and not over the heads of the audience. An interpreter should also not favor one side of the audience in his eye contact.

The third item, appearance, is equally as important for interpreters. In a park situation, a ranger's uniform seems appropriate, but this may not be true outside of the park. For example, it may not be appropriate when speaking to a militant group. At the same time, however, I would not dress in blue jeans and a buckskin jacket to show that I'm "in" with them, for the same reason that I would not attempt to speak in Pidgin English to a group of Hawaii youngsters because I know how ridiculous and forced it would sound. Sincerity in this case, I feel, is more important than attempting to put on a facade in our sorry attempt in trying to be accepted.

Up to this point I've been discussing the lecture type of interpretive talk training, but there is also the lecture with aids -- visual and/or mechanical. Let me illustrate the use of a visual aid with this lemon (lemon demonstration). Interpreters must know the power of visual aids.

They must also be aware of the use of pictures, flip charts, blackboards, slides, movies, demonstrations, overhead projectors, etc. An interpreter cannot be lazy. If he is going to use aids such as a movie or slide projector, he must be professional about it. He cannot just "fly by the seat of his pants" and not check his slides or film, and equipment out in advance. There is nothing that ruins an interpretive program more than a slipshod operation where the interpreter is sloppy, where the movie film is threaded improperly or where the slides are poor, or are in upside down.

Interpretive training looks at an interpreter from the point of view of, "Is he getting his message across?" rather than from the point of view of, "Is he using the King's English?"

And if he is trained to have the interest of his audience at heart and is trained in the proper techniques, he will be able to perform like Pagliacci, the clown, who turned

in a good performance even though his son was dying at that very moment.

Interpretive training can be broken down into attitudinal and skills training -- attitudinal in the sense of awareness of the importance of the resource, thereby instilling a desire to help protect it. Hopefully, the interpreter will not turn into a knight in shining armor who's sole mission will be to charge head-on into the dragon and to slay it. Hopefully he will use the strategy of awareness first.

In the area of skills training the interpreter will need to be trained in the art of looking at the total picture -- that he is stalking the goat, not merely for meat but also to make amends for the "evil," in quotation marks, that man has introduced to the native Hawaiian landscape.

Following that he must be able to do a written outline whether he is going to give a talk, a talk with aids, preparing an interpretive publication, an interpretive sign system, building a guided or self-guiding trail, writing an audiovisual program, an audio script, a sound-slide program using a lapse-dissolve device, or making a movie.

Beyond this the interpreter must be trained in the skills of communications -- verbal and non-verbal. The voice, gestures, body control, choice of words and phrases, rate of speaking, diction.

The voice I've already discussed. Gestures, including hand gestures, must conform with what the interpreter is saying. For example, he should not use a low hand gesture when he's talking about a high mountain. Perhaps every interpreter should be required to take hula lessons to master the art of gestures.

Body control means that the interpreter must not sway from side to side or backward and forward as he is speaking. It also means that he must not shift from one foot to another. It also means that he should not play with his eyeglasses or fidget with his papers.

Choice of words or phrases must also be made carefully when speaking before the public. They're very quick to take things out of context and the interpreter will lose his audience or be taken aback by an unexpected laughter, for a few minutes. Let me cite a couple of examples. There's a battlefield park, which will remain nameless, where there was a sign that said, "The general leaped up on the parapet and exposed himself." Another occurred as a passage in a handbook in a historical park which said, "General Burgoyne's right and left flanks lay in the woods, but his front was open."

Continuing on, rate of speaking and diction are fairly obvious. They mean, for one thing, opening your mouth. Nervousness does tend to make an interpreter speak faster, but I don't know of a single case where a person can speak rapidly if he opens his mouth and pronounces his words carefully. And then, one word about diction. Good diction saves your vocal cords because you don't need to shout!

In interpretive skills training, the use of a tape recorder and videotape is a must. No interpreter can deny what he did, for better or worse, because it's right on the tape or film. Besides, he can hear and see himself as others do. These are two very effective methods of feedback or evaluation for the interpreter. Their value cannot be overemphasized in interpretive training.

But in the end, interpretive training can only point the way. It is up to the interpreter to work with his trainer to determine what techniques best suits his particular personality. For example, they may find that he is not at all a lecture type speaker, but will be more effective in conducting team activities or problem-solving. The possibilities are many. Interpretive training is in a way like the wife in Japan. There is an old saying there that says, "The man is the head of the house, but it is the wife who is the neck which turns the head."